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COMMENTARY

Is Capitol Hill a forum for Soviet propaganda? JOHN ANDREW

Nearly everyone is familiar with the recent Soviet propaganda efforts involving letters by "concerned" Americans to Soviet Communist Party Chairman Yuri Andropov. In fact, *Pravda* recently published a letter from a Washington-area woman who claimed, "I love my country, but I love the Soviet Union, too." The media gleefully noted how she feels that "Ronald Reagan is not telling the truth," and prefers to trust the former head of the KGB.

It is disturbing that the U.S. media give prime attention to blatant Soviet propaganda efforts. But worse is the naivete and gullibility of those whose opinions have an effect on shaping United States policy—members of Congress and their staffs.

These people, who work daily in the public policy field, should be particularly sensitive to biased and distorted information. Unfortunately, certain members and their staffers are often unknowingly used as tools for Soviet propagandists.

Congressional staff members have many opportunities to meet government representatives from foreign countries, especially those from the communist bloc. Members of Congress often invite leaders of these countries for such things as "exchanges of views."

However, by doing so, what members of Congress are really offering these foreign guests is a unique opportunity to gain direct access to policy-makers and the Western news media. These forums confer upon communist-bloc officials, especially, a certain legitimacy which is completely undeserved.

John Andrew is the pen name of a congressional staffer.

Three recent examples graphically bear these points out.

This April, Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., sponsored the visit of a number of members of the Nicaraguan Assembly. These Nicaraguans participated in a press conference before answering questions from congressional staff members. The question-and-answer session started with the Nicaraguans announcing that free elections would be held just as soon as "the laws to allow them" were enacted.

They quickly added the caveat, though, that the elections might have to be postponed because of U.S. aggression. They then stated categorically that Nicaragua was not supplying the Marxist guerrillas in El Salvador. None of those present in the audience attempted to question this assertion.

The Nicaraguans said, Americans should know "we have an open border policy." Perhaps this means the Salvadoran guerrillas pass in and out of Nicaragua, much as U.S. citizens do when they go to Canada or Mexico.

Astonishingly enough, most of the audience sat there and accepted this propaganda. The meeting ended when one of Conyer's assistants related how he had been a member of the U.S. Peace Corps in the 1960s, and how shocked he was to note that Cuba's "Peace Corps" is larger than the present day U.S. Peace Corps.

What was not brought up, though, was the fact that Cuba doesn't have a "peace corps" in the U.S. sense of the word. Cuba's "peace corps" is really elements of its armed forces performing "peaceful duties" in Angola, the Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Yemen, Nicaragua and Grenada.

Rep. Michael Barnes, D-Md., was the sponsor of the second recent "exchange of views." He was kind enough to invite Nicaraguan Minister of Justice Carlos Arguelo to speak to staff members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Arguelo related how President Reagan had declared war on his country, and how his nation was being besieged by CIA-supported rebel forces consisting solely of Somocistas, and former National Guard members.

When asked about Eden Pastora, "Commander Zero," he remarked

that "Pastora was a traitor, and was an unimportant part of the revolution anyway." In reality, Pastora was second in command of the revolutionary government and had actually led the storming of Somoza's palace.

Unfortunately, no one thought to bring this up, including the committee's professional staff members who were present. They were content to sit and listen to the edifying "exchange of views."

The third, and by far the worst instance, of members of Congress providing forums for communist

propaganda happened even more recently. This was a press conference sponsored by Rep. Pat Schroeder, D-Colo., involving members of the European peace movement. This diverse group consisted of a number of European Catholic priests, two West German peace activists, a member of the English Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, two South Pacific islanders prompting a "nuclear-free independence" for the island of Palu, and finally, Fritz Dorgeloh, member of the Youth Commission Staff of the Protestant Churches in East Germany.

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